



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Alexander Laufer** is the Editor-in-Chief of ASK Magazine and a member of the Advisory Board of the NASA Academy of Program and Project Leadership. He is also a visiting professor in the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Maryland at College Park and Dean of Civil Engineering at Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. You can contact him at [allauffer@askmagazine.org](mailto:allauffer@askmagazine.org).

**A "Sweet 16" Of Rules About Teamwork**

by Dr. Alexander Laufer

The following "Sweet 16" rules included here derive from a longer paper by APPL Director Dr. Edward Hoffman and myself entitled "99 Rules for Managing Faster, Better, Cheaper Projects." Our sources consisted mainly of "war stories" told by master project managers in my book *Simultaneous Management: Managing Projects in a Dynamic Environment* (AMACOM, The American Management Association, 1996). The Simultaneous Management model was a result of 10 years of intensive research and testing conducted with the active participation of master project managers from leading private organizations such as AT&T, DuPont, Exxon, General Motors, IBM, Motorola and Procter & Gamble.

In a more recent study, led by Dr. Hoffman, we learned that master project managers in leading public organizations employ most of these rules as well. Both studies, in private and public organizations, found that a dynamic environment calls for dynamic management, and that is especially clear in how successful project managers think about their teams.

1. Two parties (and certainly more than two) of a speedy project launched with incomplete information will find it impossible to sustain an ongoing relationship based on a fixed agreement that was made between them at the beginning of the project. A more flexible mechanism, based on teamwork and collaboration, is needed to handle the unexpected changes that are bound to arise. Therefore, contracting should emphasize cooperation rather than risk allocation.
2. Project success depends on successful teamwork. Establishing a multifunctional group with team spirit facilitates both communication and coordination, and it promotes strong loyalty to the project. Such a team can make quality decisions that represent all disciplines.
3. No real teamwork can take place in an organization that maintains the traditional division of labor, because R&D, marketing, engineering and production people are loyal primarily to their respective disciplines, departments and managers. Therefore, breaking down the organization's functional walls is the minimum essential condition for teamwork.
4. Assign people for the duration of the project. Team member continuity is vital for better accountability and commitment. Since team knowledge lies in the shared viewpoints and experience that team members develop over an extended period, greater continuity means better decision-making and faster projects.

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

### A "Sweet 16" Of Rules About Teamwork (cont'd)

5. Master project managers pay great attention to the size of their project team. They create the smallest team possible that includes all the necessary skills.
6. A project team should first concentrate on getting to know one another and then on deciding on how best to function as a team. Sharing clear expectations, appreciating cultural differences between organizations, and understanding the different reward systems of these organizations will reduce the time it takes to form a finely tuned, effective team.
7. Trusting relationships are conducive to full and open exchange of information within the team. In contrast, when project parties distrust each other, they withhold relevant information and distort intentions, thus adding uncertainty to the project. Trust reduces the cost of planning and monitoring transactions between organizations.
8. Once you stereotype a team member, prejudice shapes what you see and how you act. Thus, initial opinions of the individuals entering the project are important in shaping its final outcome. These initial opinions can force the project into a spiral of increasing or decreasing trust. Therefore, if possible, don't select team members who start the project distrusting you. Build trust incrementally by making statements of intent, which express your desire to trust the other party, followed by actions that support and comply with these statements.
9. You should make sure that members of your team feel dependent upon each other, and share a belief that they are mutually responsible for project results. A group of people who don't feel dependent upon each other is a committee, not a team.
10. You can't manufacture extraordinary team performance merely by designing the right structure, selecting the right people, providing the right vision and rewards, and facilitating the right work processes. All these are very helpful, but to achieve peak team performance you must develop rich, intimate, and emotional relationships among skilled people who trust one another and who enjoy spending time with one other.
11. Dedicated teamwork does not require the ultimate sublimation of the individual. On the contrary, as a leader you should empower team members to be constantly at their peak by giving them the necessary discretion and autonomy to make things happen.

**A "Sweet 16" Of Rules About Teamwork (cont'd)**

12. Having members with diverse professional orientations and different organizational interests and cultures can have only negative implications, and this is the reason why projects and conflicts are always bound to be synonymous. True? No! Definitely false. In a collaborative environment these differences may provide the crucial positive edge that leads to innovative solutions.
13. Don't ignore space and neighborhood management. Teams must spend a lot of time together, especially at the beginning. The chances are considerably better that geographic proximity allows people to come to appreciate and even like one another. Also, in co-located teams many informal face-to-face interactions occur daily. This frequent face-to-face communication clarifies understanding and accelerates speed.
14. Don't overlook the intangibles, such as team culture, language, and ritual. They help create team identity, establish a sense of order, build team spirit, release tension, and cope with time pressure and uncertainty.
15. If you are having fun, you aren't working, right? No -- that's absolutely wrong! Look for the many natural opportunities to celebrate team accomplishments and hard effort. Use these events to give team members the high visibility and special recognition they have earned. In successful teams, fun both sustains and is sustained by team achievements.
16. To sustain performance, teamwork requires constant massaging. Therefore, throughout the project life cycle, master project managers ensure alignment on project objectives, assess team functioning, and renew team energy.

*Read all of the "99 Rules for Managing Faster, Better, Cheaper Projects" at <http://216.141.196.2/NASA/Laufer/99Rules.htm>*